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## Hiding Between *Basho* and *Chōra* *Re-imagining and Re-placing the Elemental*

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### Abstract

This essay considers the relation between two fundamentally different notions of place—the Greek concept of *χώρα* and the Japanese concept of *basho* 場所—in an effort to address the question of a possible “other beginning” to philosophy by re-thinking the relation between nature and the elemental. Taking up a cross-cultural comparative approach, ancient through contemporary Eastern and Western sources are considered. Central to this endeavor is reflection on the concept of the *between* through an engagement between, on the one hand, Plato, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Edward Casey, and John Sallis, and on the other, Eihei Dōgen, Nishida Kitarō, and Watsuji Tetsurō.

### Keywords

elemental – nature – place – Greek Philosophy – Kyoto School – Zen Buddhism

“Nature loves to hide” (Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ), Heraclitus of Ephesus is famously credited with having said.<sup>1</sup> But where does nature hide? In what place or space? Has it always hid from the beginning? Or is the beginning the event of the hiding? Nature and the elemental are inextricably connected. And the question of the elemental is bound to the question of the beginning. Does

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1 See John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 134; Milton Nahm, *Selections from Early Greek Philosophy*, 4th ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), 68; Philip Wheelwright, ed., *The Presocratics* (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1966), 70.

nature hide behind the elemental? Or is the elemental the open hiding place of nature?

Western philosophy's home-ground is ancient Greece, but this particular beginning is no longer sufficient in itself. Today philosophy is exposed in historically unprecedented ways to diverse influences, other starting points, among which are those from East Asia. Considering this different beginning will serve as the beginning of the present reflections. Cross-cultural comparative thinking and environmental/ecological philosophy are arguably the most important philosophical waves of the new millennium. This essay endeavors to swim between both of these currents.

The medieval Japanese Zen master Eihei Dōgen 永平道元 is part of a long tradition of thinking the relation between the human being and the elemental, and so is linked in this and other ways with the so-called Kyoto School of comparative philosophy,<sup>2</sup> and in particular for our purposes here with the thinking of Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 and Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎. The philosophy of Dōgen and the greater tradition that informed his thinking represents another beginning, one that in its own fashion overcomes a dualistic, hierarchical metaphysics. There is a strong resonance between the Western philosophical tradition and that of Buddhism that is only now starting to be fully appreciated and understood. The recent work of John Sallis<sup>3</sup> addresses the question of the elemental and what it means to dwell in nature by engaging ancient through contemporary sources, from the Presocratics to Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida. This essay stages a conversation between Eastern and Western

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2 The appellation "Kyoto school," which appears to have originated sometime in the early 1930s, refers to approximately two-dozen philosophers associated with the Kyoto Imperial University and connected through their association with the thinking of Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime. For a history and critical overview of the Kyoto School, see James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001); Robert E. Carter, *The Kyoto School: An Introduction*, with forward by Thomas P. Kasulis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2103); Bret W. Davis, "The Kyoto School," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2006), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kyoto-school/>.

Japanese names will be written in the Japanese order of family name first, except in cases where authors of works in English have used the Western order; in such cases, the family name will be given in small caps (e.g., Kazuaki TANAHASHI). Chinese names are given in pinyin.

All foreign terms will be in either ancient Greek, German, or Japanese, unless otherwise indicated. Chinese terms will be designated parenthetically by the abbreviation "Ch." and Sanskrit terms by "Sk."

3 John Sallis, *The Return of Nature: On the Beyond of Sense* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016); and *The Figure of Nature: On Greek Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

perspectives on the elemental and nature in an effort to think another beginning that is truly global in scope.

Altering the ways in which we think about and respond to the global problem of rapid environmental change is the first step toward adequately addressing a long-term solution for our current and future problems. Fundamental to the East Asian perspectives presented here is the emphasis on the principles of unity and balance from a holistic and organic standpoint. This has implications for the way that causality is conceived in the external enviroing world and for understanding internal life-movements. Arriving at this realization of balance and unity necessitates turning away from our anthropocentrically based conceptions of nature, space, place, ecology, environment, and world toward a vision of shared dwelling on the Earth, wherein the metaphysical and epistemological dualisms that still hold sway over the popular mind-set are “cast aside” or “drop off,” to use Dōgen’s expression.<sup>4</sup> Though distinct, the classic philosophies of Daoism, Buddhism, and Zen (as well as Confucianism, which will not be taken up here) share the common perspective that the human and the nonhuman inseparably coexist. How we view this interrelationship is what defines our existence. At the risk of over-generalizing, this standpoint is what distinguishes East Asian philosophies from most Western philosophical, theological, and scientific perspectives.

By bringing together in conversation ancient through contemporary viewpoints from very diverse cultures, one witnesses the unfolding of comparative world philosophy. Philosophy today is a truly global venture, one that goes beyond the simple and increasingly problematic distinction of the so-called East and West as it moves toward expanded forms of cultural, social, and ecological

4 The famous phrase “dropping off (or casting aside) mind and body” (*shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落) is found in several of Dōgen’s writings: Dōgen, “Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen” (*Fukanzazengi* 普勸坐禪儀), in *Soto School Scriptures for Daily Services and Practice*, ed. and trans. Carl Bielefeldt and T. Griffith Foulk, with Rev. Taigen Leighton and Rev. Shohaku OKUMURA (Tokyo: Sotoshu Shumicho and the Soto Zen Text Project, 2001), 81; Dōgen, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen’s Shobo Genzo*, Vol. 1, “Actualizing the Fundamental Point” (*Genjōkōan* 現成公案), ed. Kazuaki TANAHASHI (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2010), 30; Dōgen, *A Primer of Sōtō Zen: A Translation of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, trans. Reihō MASUNAGA (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1971), 47, 49; Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō-zuimonki* [正法眼藏隨聞記]: *Sayings of Eihei Dōgen Zenji recorded by Koun Ejō*, trans. Shohaku OKUMURA (Kyoto: Kyoto Soto-Zen Center, 1987).

For excellent commentaries on this, see Takashi James KODERA, *Dōgen’s Formative Years in China: An Historical Study and Annotated Translation of the “Hōkyō-ki”* (Boulder, CO: Prajñā Press, 1980), 58–65; Shohaku OKUMURA, *Realizing Genjōkōan: The Key to Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, with foreword by Taigen Dan Leighton (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010), esp. 75–92; Steven Heine, “Dogen Casts Off ‘What’: An Analysis of *Shinjin Datsuraku*,” *The Journal Of The International Association Of Buddhist Studies* 9, no. 1 (1986): 53–70.

diversity. The fundamental teaching of the Buddhist *Prajñāparamitā Sūtra* (*Heart of Wisdom Sutra*) is that emptiness is form and form is emptiness (Sk. *śūnyatā*; Ch. *wu* 無; *kū* 空).<sup>5</sup> Here one finds *another* “other beginning” (*andere Anfang*),<sup>6</sup> so that now it is possible to think a veritable *coincidentia oppositorum* between significantly different cultural and philosophical approaches on multiple registers. Capturing in a concise way the aim of the present reflections, the Dutch philosopher Marjoleine Oele opines:

The only way forward, I imagine, is to turn back and reimagine and reconceive a new beginning: one focused on natural, material potencies at the expense of pre-established actualities, and one that sees nature as collaboratively designed and framed within a non-hierarchical politics of nature. For this rebirth and regeneration to happen, much has to change, and much has to be learned.... [before] nature folds back upon itself and is constantly regenerated, in solidarity with others.<sup>7</sup>

Both East and West have much to learn from the other, as do the northern and southern hemispheres. Comparative and cross-cultural thinking is a necessary beginning. If there is anything that can bring the world together in peaceful cooperation, then surely it must be the fate of our shared, fragile Earth.

## I Beginning and the Between

The question of the beginning or origin (ἀρχή) as it appears in the transition from Presocratic to Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy determined the

5 The reader will note that the Japanese kanji 空 (*kū*) is used to translate “emptiness” whereas in Chinese the character 無 (*wu*) is employed. The reason is for this probably has to do with an early translation decision that was made to distinguish the Buddhist conception of emptiness from the Daoist conception. The kanji 無 (*mu*) is generally translated variously as “nothingness,” “nothing,” “nonbeing,” “no,” “without.” *Wu* can also have the same meaning depending on the context.

6 This phrase is from Heidegger’s work in the 1930s. See Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), 44–49, 135–49. Also, on the difference between the first (*erste*) and other (*andere*) beginning (*Anfang*), cf. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 2 Vols. (Pfullingen: Verlag Günter Neske, 1961), I, 259, 365, 390, 395, 470, 480, 547, 626, 656–67; II, 29, 202–03, 279, 471, 481.

7 Marjoleine Oele, “Folding Nature Back Upon Itself: Aristotle and the Rebirth of *Physis*,” in Gerard Kuperus and Marjolein Oele, eds., *Ontologies of Nature: Continental Perspectives and Environmental Reorientations* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017), 64.

Western understanding and articulation (λόγος) of the truth (ἀλήθεια) of nature (φύσις), shifting or changing from a dynamic process of unconcealment to a presence stabilized in the recurrence of eternal essences or forms (εἶδη). But this metaphysics reflects only a particular origin, “the first beginning” (*der erste Anfang*) that has come down through Western history as “Platonism,” in which nature (*natura*) and truth (*veritas*) eventually become reified as essential forms. Branching off the various critiques of this metaphysics by Schelling, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida, in his recently published works on philosophy and nature Sallis turns our attention to another beginning located in Plato’s *Timaeus*, wherein the notion of transcendence as signaling a movement toward that which is beyond being (ἐπέκεινα της οὐσίας; 509b8–9) is replaced by the dyadic interaction of the receptacle (χώρα) and the demiurge (δημιουργός; 28a, 29a), the divine artificer or maker. This other conception of space (χώρα), though itself formless (ἄμορφον), is nevertheless the place-holder of the equally formless elemental. It is to this that Sallis draws our attention, emphasizing that the elemental is only experienced and known via its manifestation as the elements, for example, as mountains, waters, sky, lightning, forests—that is, in a *place*.

Developing a reading of the chorological Plato, Sallis posits the *between* in a way that goes beyond both Plato and Heidegger’s efforts to think the other beginning and offers us yet another possibility, one that moves beyond the abstraction of those efforts and renders a more concrete beginning, which has remained largely unsaid in the history of metaphysics, namely, the elemental. To this end, the power of the imagination (εὐκασία) is invoked. This paves the way for a potentially fruitful engagement with Dōgen’s thinking about the elemental in his monumental work *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 (*Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*), particularly in the fascicles “*Sansuikyō*” 山水經 (Mountains and Waters Sutra) and “*Busshō*” 佛性 (Buddha Nature),<sup>8</sup> which is taken up toward the end of this essay. Dōgen both problematizes and gives new impetus to the human being through a consideration of how the notions of individuality and conscious action are codependent with the action of the elementals with which our lives are intertwined.

Before Dōgen’s thinking is engaged, however, the Platonic idea of *χώρα* from the perspective of Nishida Kitarō, generally considered to be modern Japan’s first original philosopher, will be considered. Nishida, who knew Western

8 Dōgen, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen’s Shobo Genzo*, Vol. 1, “Mountains and Waters Sutra” (*Sansuikyō* 山水經); “Buddha Nature” (*Busshō* 佛性); ed. Kazuaki TANAHASHI (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2010), 235–59; 154–64.

philosophy and its history well,<sup>9</sup> took up the idea of *χώρα* and extended its meaning in his effort to formulate a “logic of place” (*basho no ronri* 場所の論理). In order to think what it means to be human one has to think first in terms of place. That place is always specified, which brings us to the concepts of earth, territory, and region. To be is always to be in place, and for the person, whether thought individually or collectively, to be in place is always to be in a particular context, that is, in a life-place, a bioregion. The specificity of place it is always a self-delimitation of the *basho* (場所) of absolute nothingness (*zettai mu* 絶対無). Nishida’s idea of absolute nothingness is then addressed with respect to the idea of Buddha-nature and discussed in the light of Dōgen’s philosophy.

The concept of betweenness (*aidagara* 間柄) is central to the philosophy of Watsuji Tetsurō, and also to the general theme of this essay. This concept is taken up in the context of his conception of climate or milieu (*fūdo* 風土) in relation to his concept of the human being (*ningen* 人間). In one of his most significant works, *Fūdo* 風土 (*Climate and Culture*),<sup>10</sup> Watsuji argues that the concept of climate is necessary in order to understand what it means to be fully human, a position he develops in response to Heidegger’s early work *Being and Time*, of which he was one of the first readers.<sup>11</sup> The idea of *fūdo* helps make concrete Nishida’s place (*basho*) of absolute nothingness. Watsuji’s importance here is to help bring us back from Nishida to the bioregional perspective of dwelling in nature, and from there back to the elemental.

It is at this point that Dōgen comes back into the picture. Place must also be thought in relation to time in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of spatiality, or “placiality,” to use Edward Casey’s term,<sup>12</sup> or what I more expansively

9 It was through Nishida’s encouragement that the other founding figures of the Kyoto School, Tanabe Hajime 田辺元 and Nishitani Keiji 啓治西谷, studied in Germany during the years between the first and second world wars (Tanabe in 1922–24, Nishitani in 1936–39). There they engaged the history of Western thought from its ancient through to its modern expressions, with particular focus on Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, and Bergson, mediated by direct encounters with Husserl and Heidegger, the very thinkers with whom Nishida had sent them to study. Upon returning to Japan, they commenced the work for which the Kyoto school is primarily known: the interaction of European and East Asian thinking.

10 Watsuji Tetsurō, *Climate and Culture*, trans. Geoffrey Bownas (New York: Greenwood Press, Inc. in cooperation with Yushodo Co., Ltd, 1988); originally published as *A Climate: A Philosophical Study*, trans. Geoffrey Bownas (Tokyo: Printing Bureau, Japanese Government, 1961).

11 On this see David W. Johnson, *Watsuji on Nature: Japanese Philosophy in the Wake of Heidegger* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2019).

12 This term along with “placial” is introduced in Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

call *templaciality*. Dōgen's notions of flow (*ryū* 流) and the now-moment (*nikon* 而今) in the *Shobōgenzō* fascicles “*Sansuikyō*” (Mountains and Waters Sutra) and “*Uji*” 有時 (The Time-Being) are important here. The fascicle “*Busshō*” (Buddha Nature) is then analyzed with respect to Nishida's idea of *basho*—with the caveat that the central or ultimate concept being moving toward is not *basho* but rather dwelling in nature, dwelling bioregionally. Bioregionalism is a living alongside and within the land, orienting one's ways and rhythms according to those of the region in which one dwells. This is the move that Dōgen prefigures in “*Uji*.” To really think place is to think it in conjunction with time, but in order to think this we also need to think about specific spaces, in other words, places. Here the philosophy of Watsuji is especially helpful. Put in a slightly different way: to think space we need to think time, but to think spacetime we need to think place; to think place is to think of specific places, and bioregionalism is the thinking of those specific places as it concerns the human being in relation to all other beings and things. This is the interconnectedness or dependent origination (Sk. *pratītyasamutpāda*)<sup>13</sup> of all things, the impermanent Buddha-nature of all things. Dōgen is central here because he extends the notion of Buddha-nature to also include nonsentient existence, which is to say, the elemental.

## II Φύσις and the Elemental

Why does rethinking the elemental lead to bioregionalism? Because space is always tied to place, and the elemental apprehended apart from placiality remains an invisible abstraction. Just as Hegel saw that the concepts of being and nothingness, taken in themselves, are empty, so too is the concept of space. In fact, it is the essence, or nature, if we can say that, of space to be empty. And just as the truth of the relation between being and nothing—that is, becoming—is realized for Hegel only after working through the logic of the system, but now realized as being prior to the dyad being and nothing, so too is the concept of space only realized from the standpoint of the concrete place, or the elemental, which is also prior to and makes possible the abstract concept of space.

13 Dependent origination is a fundamental metaphysical concept common to all schools of Buddhism. Along with the concept of *karma*, it forms the Buddhist conception of causality, stating that all phenomena arise together in a mutually interdependent nexus of cause and effect. Because all phenomena are thus conditioned and transient or impermanent, they have no real independent identity and thus no permanent, substantial existence, even if to the ordinary mind this is not apparent. All phenomena are therefore fundamentally empty.

Φύσις is the name of the process by which this concealed dimension of space is disclosed or brought forth as place. The elements, which are the manifestations of the elemental, are always in particular configurations and patterns and those are the *bioregions*. What I am attempting to do here is to rethink space concretely in terms of the elemental. Space only appears as place, or more precisely as *places*.

To rethink the meaning and importance of φύσις—that is, the process of nature, with the emphasis on process—we need to think it in relation to the elemental. How do we do this? And why (re)turn to the elemental? Sallis follows Heidegger in returning to the Presocratics, but he also returns to Plato, who has been identified often since Nietzsche as the problem figure. On target as his critique of *Platonism* is, however, Nietzsche never really went back and reread his Plato. Philosophy has often identified, and produced, so-called doctrines in Plato that are not actually there, most notably the theory of forms, which has resulted in an often exaggerated metaphysical and epistemological dualism in his thinking. Plato was first and foremost a speculative philosopher in the sense that he was continually rethinking the same set of problems in different ways. This is why, for instance, one encounters a Plato who, on the one hand, can think the possibility of the ἀγαθόν ἐπέκεινα της οὐσίας, of the Good beyond being, and, on the other hand, speculate about a radically different cosmology such as presented in the dialogue *Timaeus*. The fact of the matter is that many of the problems rightly associated with Platonism begin not so much with Plato but rather with his and Aristotle's interpreters and the ensuing tradition of Christian Neoplatonism.

Sallis points out that the “double sense of nature”—that is, nature conceived as both something essential, in itself, as a form, and nature as designating the world of natural things—“extends back to Greek antiquity: already in the Platonic dialogues the word φύσις is commonly used in both senses.”<sup>14</sup> This double meaning provided the distinction between the intelligible and sensible that founded metaphysics, and also determined the meaning of φύσις. The truth that metaphysics discloses is inseparably linked to φύσις. One of Heidegger's great contributions is the delineation of this relationship.

How did the phenomenon of φύσις come to determine the concepts of ἀλήθεια and λόγος, that is to say, the way we think and speak about the truth of nature? The Presocratic view of φύσις as “abiding-emergence” implies a sense of balance and stability.<sup>15</sup> However, φύσις is not a static state but rather

14 Sallis, *The Return of Nature*, 52.

15 Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 14.



an ecstatic process. The conception of φύσις as abiding presence is a revelatory process in which what is hidden becomes revealed, that is, brought forth from concealment and yet still able to stand in itself.<sup>16</sup> Φύσις is simultaneously present and absent; being and becoming are inextricably tied together. The essence or idea of nature and the realm of natural things—for example, trees, mountains, waters, animals—form the double sense of nature. Heidegger's early philosophy is an attempt to recapture the original sense of wonder and awe of the Presocratic view of the world.

Plato incorporates the emerging or “standing forth” aspect of φύσις into his notion of ἰδέα, but in so doing, Heidegger maintains, he detaches the emerging sense of presence from its original background of φύσις as abiding-emergence and its interplay with ἀλήθεια, the process of bringing to light or presence what was hidden or obscured. This results in a removal of truth from the world and a subsequent situating of it in a suprasensible, intelligible world of forms. The ἰδέα, as absolute universal form, thus betrays the original meaning of φύσις, which in turn now functions as a modality of οὐσία. Being is interpreted increasingly in terms of static presence by substance metaphysics, and the Presocratic conception of world and cosmos as flux is either ignored or systematically downplayed as, for example, in *Theaetetus* or in Aristotle's view of αἴσθησις (sensation; perception).

The history of metaphysics henceforth begins to lose the dynamism of φύσις and comes to reveal itself as a binary structure privileging one term (essence) over the other (existence) in the guise of a unitary Being. The double stance of οὐσία—the revealing of something that is and the what that stands and appears—loses its Presocratic sense and its meaning is reified as ὑποκείμενον. Thus the “gathering up” process of the λόγος stops; the dialectic ceases between being and beings. The meaning of being, as Heidegger famously declares, is forgotten. This forgetting is due to the exposition of being as ἰδέα resulting from a change in the meaning of ἀλήθεια.<sup>17</sup>

There is a triple sense of weakening in the shift in the meaning of ἀλήθεια. First, φύσις loses much of its sense of power, that is, the movement from potency to actuality (δύναμις), leading to the later dominant interpretation of nature as something given and fixed (*natura*).

Second, the intimate connection between elemental nature and our own nature is diminished. The phrase “our nature” in Greek is ἡμετέρα φύσις. According to Plato, who uses this phrase when introducing the famous cave

16 Ibid., 182.

17 Parts of this section can be found in my *Altared Ground: Levinas, History, and Violence* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 27–28.

allegory in *Republic* book VII (514a), we do not realize anything about our nature unless we come to know it through παιδεία (education), the essence of which is a *spatial* transformation, a turning around of the soul (περιαγωγή της ψυχῆς; 518d).<sup>18</sup> And the knowledge of φύσις as *process*, through its later Latin translations as *natura*, becomes equally elusive in meaning. Φύσις and ἡμετέρα φύσις, nature and our nature, are brought into meaning by παιδεία. The unfettered prisoner in the cave comes into awareness and knowledge about the actual natural world, the expansiveness of physical and psychological space, through the development of λόγος and only afterward arrives at ἀλήθεια, which is the process of bringing forth or disclosing what is actual.

Third, the shift in the meaning of ἀλήθεια results in the dissociation of knowing (ἐπιστήμη) from imagination (εἰκασία), which is the beginning of all subsequent rational thought (διάνοια) and understanding (νόησις), as Plato stipulates in the so-called divided line analogy at the end of *Republic* book VI (510a–511e). Meaning more than just the numerous standard interpretations of delusion, mere conjecture, or baseless opinion, εἰκασία is the foundation of Plato's epistemology. Different from φαντασία, which came to be translated later by both the Latin words *imaginatio* and *phantasia*,<sup>19</sup> εἰκασία is the power that enables the soul (ψυχή) to apprehend both the visible and invisible aspects of knowing. Sallis defines εἰκασία as “apprehending images (εἰκόνων) as images in such a way that one sees through them to the originals which they image.”<sup>20</sup> I submit that εἰκασία is also what makes possible the apprehension of the elemental and renders a certain power over their indeterminateness. As Sallis notes, “The indefiniteness of elementals is linked to another character that they display: elementals are gigantic, if not simply monstrous, in their extent. For they utterly exceed the proportions of humans and of natural things, indeed in such a way that they share no common measure with the things they encompass.”<sup>21</sup> Without the imagination, the elemental remains at the level of a terrifying mystery and monstrosity, and nature assumes an unnatural visage.

18 On this see Martin Heidegger, “Plato's Doctrine of Truth,” in *Pathmarks*, trans. and ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 166.

19 John Sallis, *Delimitations: Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics*, 2nd expanded edition (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986, 1995), 7.

20 *Ibid.*, 6.

21 Sallis, *The Return of Nature*, 78.

### III Imagining Another Beginning

Both Sallis and Casey have written extensively on the topic of imagination. So important, in fact, is the concept of imagination to thinking the nature of nature that Sallis offers an extended consideration of it in the Prologue to *The Return of Nature*:

One of the names that have been given to that which comes to supplement sense is *imagination*. Only through the coming of imagination is it possible to apprehend natural things ... as well as things fabricated from nature. Only through the coming of imagination can such things be displayed before us, either as they cohere within the return and withdrawal of nature or as (in the case of fabricated things) they are set at the limit of nature. Yet, within nature there is gathered not only the configuration of things but also the elements that encompass them.... Since the things of nature are encompassed by various elements—and always by Earth and sky—they can be apprehended in the fullness of their appearance only if they show themselves within their elemental setting, only if an openness to the elements belongs intrinsically to their apprehension.... Just as the coming of imagination is necessary for the full apprehension of natural things as they appear before sense, so its coming is required also for the openness to the elements that belongs to full apprehension.... As imagination comes to let things appear in their elemental setting, it also traces out the spacings of the elementals, which constitute the mobile structure of nature at large.<sup>22</sup>

I want to draw our attention not only to the place that imagination occupies in the apprehension of natural things, but also to the phrase that appears twice, though in slightly differently formulations for emphasis, in the passage above: the “openness to the elements that belongs [intrinsically] to [full] apprehension.” The difference is that the first formulation includes the word “intrinsically” but omits “full,” and in the second formulation it is the other way around. Indeed, it is this very aspect of *openness* that makes possible the “emergence of another sense of nature,” which occurs in the “disruption of the intelligible/sensible dyad,” a disruption most manifest in Plato’s *Timaeus*. I will not retrace the movement of this disruption, which Sallis does later in the text, drawing our attention to the Pythagorean thinker Timaeus’s introduction of a third kind (τρίτον γένος; 48e4, 52a) into the intelligible/sensible dyad, namely, the

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 2–3.

receptacle (ὑποδοχη; 49a5–6) or the recipient (δεχομενον; 50d3) which, being formless or amorphous (ἄμορφον; 50b–51a), is neither being nor nonbeing.

A different name holds more resonance for our considerations here: χώρα, which is commonly translated as “space,” though the word defies uniform translation. It can also be rendered as “region,” “location,” and even “country” (in fact, its prephilosophical designation was that which is outside the boundary of the πόλις), but also as “land” or “area,” Casey points out. In *Getting Back into Place*, Casey writes:

The difference between space and place is one of the best kept secrets in philosophy. Above all in modern Western philosophy, where the very distinction came to be questioned and then discredited: one way of understanding modernity ... is by its very neglect of this distinction. The ancient world, however, knew otherwise—knew better. Indeed, the premodern and postmodern join forces in a common recognition of the importance of place as something essentially other than space, something one cannot afford to ignore in its very difference from space. Let me remind you only that Plato in the *Timaeus* draws on the difference between *chōra* and *topos*.<sup>23</sup>

Casey’s analysis bears decisively on how we are to translate, name, and therefore interpret the meaning of χώρα. The ambiguous tension between χώρα and τόπος marks the *between* that is the elemental.

Following Derrida’s lead in the essay titled “*Khōra*” in *On the Name*, I will refrain from using the definite article when referring to χώρα (a move that Casey also makes) because, Derrida writes, it “presupposes the existence of a thing.... There is *khōra*; one can even ponder its *physis* and *dynamis*, or at least ponder them in a preliminary way. But what *there is*, there, is not.... There is *khōra* but *the khōra* does not exist.”<sup>24</sup> Χώρα is best grasped not in any nominative sense. As Sallis points out in *Chorology*, χώρα, in its verbal form—χωρέω—implies a making-space by withdrawing or giving way to.<sup>25</sup> Thus does χώρα manifest the perpetual revealing-concealing ἐνέργεια of φύσις. It is important to note that χώρα, this third kind of space, is neither an εἶδος in the sense of being an intelligible form nor in the sense of being an image of a form or kind, that is, a

23 Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 352.

24 Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 96–97.

25 See John Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato’s Timaeus* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 118.

sensible thing. Derrida writes that the word  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$  “at times appears to be neither this nor that, at times both this and that,” oscillating “*between* the logic of exclusion and that of participation.”<sup>26</sup> Reason fails to grasp the elusive nature of  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$ , which is why the employment of the imagination is so critical.

Building on this crucial observation about the nature of  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$ , and after a brief exposition of some of the various ways the word  $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$  appears in the *Timaeus*, Sallis reveals the crux of his position, ironically situated in the thinking of Plato, the very philosopher most often identified with the dissociation of nature and thought: The return *of* nature is predicated on a return to the *elemental*, though “not the elements themselves, but rather the elements as not yet themselves, as mere traces ( $\iota\chi\nu\omicron\iota$  [53b2]) held in  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$ . *This entire scene lies before the birth of the heaven; it is a nature that preceded nature, a nature older than sensible nature.*”<sup>27</sup> Stated differently, the other beginning, the beginning that is otherwise than metaphysics, is grounded in a ground that is not a ground, on the primordially of the *between*.

It is tempting to turn toward Nietzsche here and engage in a reversal or inversion of his own *umgedrehter Platonismus*, given the deep and profound resonances between his thinking and that of Dōgen, but that is the matter for another project. Suffice it to say, Sallis devotes an entire chapter in *The Return of Nature* to Nietzsche in his own attempt to move beyond Platonism, though not by merely inverting it, as does Nietzsche, but by returning to Plato himself, or rather returning to a certain Plato that Nietzsche only stands at the threshold of grasping. Let us leave then this other opening with Sallis’s words: “Now that there remains [after Nietzsche] only the nature in which there are mountains and rivers, trees and flowers, the very sense of nature must be determined anew. Now we must—like Timaeus—begin again from the beginning.”<sup>28</sup>

Plato writes in *Timaeus*: “We must bring into view the nature itself of fire and water, and air and Earth, before the birth of the heaven” (48b). In other words, the elementals are already *prefigured* in  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$  even though they are hidden. This is the yet unsaid *between* of the sensible and the intelligible, the disruptive third kind. This extraordinary statement from *Timaeus* really has no place in the Platonic schema, if indeed we can refer legitimately to such a schema; it stands in a rather uncanny way on its own. The prefiguration of the elementals disrupts or displaces the very notion of  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$  itself as a somewhat neutral space of inert matter ( $\acute{\upsilon}\lambda\eta$ ) that can be encoded or impregnated by the demiurge. The elementals emerge from  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$  but not because they are simply

26 Derrida, 89; emphasis mine.

27 Sallis, *The Return of Nature*, 54; emphasis mine.

28 Ibid., 55.

grown or developed on their soil or ground, as it were, but rather because in a mysterious way the elementals are already present in *χώρα*, albeit in an unstructured or undeveloped manner. This is the hidden that is brought forth in *φύσις* and about which something can be said or thought (*λόγος*) only *after* the event of the emerging. Thus, the elementals are a kind of betweenness: they are between the metaphysical and the earthly, or nature; they are between being and beings, and between the concealed and disclosed or revealed (which are not necessarily the same).

Sallis's interesting move is to return to Plato, but not to the Plato of the Platonism that Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida, among others, critique and deconstruct. This other Plato, or rather this other side of Plato, is that of the speculative thinker who can posit the possibility of *χώρα* as the self-generative matrix that already holds within itself the prefiguration of the elemental. Sallis's project is in part to draw out that experience of the elemental, to think of being (*Seyn*) concretely as the elemental. This is yet another "other beginning," similar to but not the same as that which Heidegger is trying to think in *Beiträge*.

We might again turn to Derrida for insight: "in order to think *khōra*, it is necessary to go back to a beginning that is older than the beginning, namely, the birth of the cosmos."<sup>29</sup> The elemental is what has been squeezed out of the picture, as it were, in the relation between being and beings, the intelligible and the sensible, form and appearance. In traditional metaphysics, there has been no place for the elementals; we are unable to locate them. To begin with the elementals then is to begin from a nonmetaphysical, that is, a spatial-temporal, standpoint, or perhaps a standpoint that is (and I use this word cautiously given its Levinasian resonances) *otherwise* than metaphysics.

#### IV Nishida's Logic of *Basho*

How can we think a global philosophy that resists the leveling and commodifying effects of globalization and returns us to a more holistic way of thinking and relating to nature and the elemental? Clearly such a "place of places" requires respecting the integrity of specific sites and resisting the homogenization of cultural and linguistic identities, among numerous other forms of identity. What is at stake for us today is what has been at the heart of philosophy since antiquity, namely, finding the place of what Nishida Kitarō refers to

<sup>29</sup> Derrida, 126.

as the “true universal,” that is, the concept of *basho*,<sup>30</sup> which serves in a significant way to displace our zones of familiarity in which we all too often immerse ourselves in our particular discourses. Indeed, one of Nishida’s great contributions is the development of a “logic of place.”<sup>31</sup> The Japanese term *basho* is generally translated as “place,” though it has also been rendered as “topos” or “locus.” Therefore, to minimize confusion between his and others’ use of the word *place*, I will follow the convention of many translators and generally use instead the term *basho* where appropriate.

At the beginning of his landmark 1926 essay titled simply “*Basho*” 場所, Nishida indicates that what he terms *basho* can be traced back to the ancient Greek concept of  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$ , though what he means by it is not the same as Plato.<sup>32</sup> Both  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$  and *basho* resist positive determination, but *basho* differs from  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$  in that in its negativity it is simultaneously self-determining, thereby transforming its emptiness or absolute nothingness into something. In other words, in its very formlessness, *basho* transforms itself as the groundless ground of self-formation. In this sense, it resembles what Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari following him term *chaos*, which is not the yawning, abyssal nothingness of Hesiodic  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\omicron\varsigma$  but rather something closer to the generative Platonic  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$ . This dimension of self-forming out of formlessness is developed in Nishida’s final writing, “The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview.”<sup>33</sup>

30 Nishida Kitarō, “*Basho*,” in *Place and Dialectic*, trans. John W. M. Krummel and Shigenori NAGATOMO (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 64–65, 81, 94. Nishida actually describes three kinds of *basho*: of being, of relative nothingness, and of absolute nothingness, which he employs at times in a logical sense and at other times in an ontological sense.

31 See in particular *ibid.*, 49–102. For treatments on the concepts of *basho* and absolute nothingness in Nishida, see Robert E. Carter, *The Nothingness Beyond God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō*, 2nd ed. (Saint Paul: Paragon House, 1997); David A. Dilworth, “Introduction: Nishida’s Critique of the Religious Consciousness,” in Nishida, *Last Writings*, 1–45; Nishitani Keiji, *Nishida Kitarō*, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig, with introduction by D. S. Clarke Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); John W. M. Krummel, *Nishida Kitarō’s Chiasmatic Chorology: Place of Dialectic, Dialectic of Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Hans Waldenfels, *Absolute Nothingness: Foundations for a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*, trans. J. W. Heisig (New York: Paulist Press, 1980); Robert J. J. Wargo, *The Logic of Nothingness: A Study of Nishida Kitarō* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005).

32 Nishida, *Place and Dialectic*, 50.

33 Nishida Kitarō, “The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview,” in *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1993), 47–123.

Coming at the concept of place from a fundamentally neo-Kantian standpoint, for Nishida *basho* signifies the relation between two terms that is always determined in relation to a third term, namely, the *basho* wherein the relation occurs. According to Nishida, everything exists in a place. Nishida's early philosophical concerns were primarily epistemological, attempting to overcome or move beyond the subject-object dualism characteristic of so much Western philosophy. In his writings dating from the 1930s on, however, he increasingly turns his attention toward historical and social concerns. Nishida is trying to redefine the terms that we use to think about knowing: the knower *is* a place (*basho*), not just *in* a place, and that which is known is what is *implaced*. Stated otherwise, the knower is not another object or thing implaced in space, but rather is the field of consciousness itself. Nishida understands knowledge in terms of a self-mirroring self-awareness (*jikaku* 自覚) in which "the self mirrors itself within itself."<sup>34</sup> Moreover, both intuition (which, for Nishida, is more important than the will) and thinking are implaced and are thus "identical." Nishida lays out this argument, of which a few significant sentences are quoted here:

When intuition is mirrored in the *basho* wherein it is implaced, it becomes the content of thought. Within so-called concrete thinking, intuition must also be included. I do not think that consciousness can in any way depart from the background of universal concepts. The universal concept always plays the role of a mirroring mirror.... When we say intuition, it must already involve the distinction between knower and known and moreover be their union. Accordingly, the knower does not simply entail constitution or activity (*hataraku* [働<]). Rather the knower must be that which envelops the known, nay, it must be that which mirrors it within. However, the subject-object union or the absence of subject and object must mean that *basho* becomes truly nothing and becomes simply a mirror that mirrors.<sup>35</sup>

The particular is subsumed in the universal; the particular is a self-determination of the universal. But what is this universal? Addressing the relation between Nishida's logic of place and cross-cultural dialogue, Bret Davis incisively writes: "The universal of nothingness is the inherently indeterminate place of absolute nothingness, which Nishida comes to think of not only as the creative source of self-determination but also as the 'dialectical universal' that

<sup>34</sup> Nishida, *Place and Dialectic*, 54.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.



enables the interaction between individual and species, as well as between one individual and another.”<sup>36</sup> This is the precise place where Nishida’s notion of *basho* differs from Plato’s  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$ , and also from Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of chaos. The “true universal” is “the place of absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu no basho* 絶対無の場所) or the “place of true nothing” (*shin no mu no basho* 心の無の場所) as opposed to that of being (*Sein*).

It is important to clarify Nishida’s use of the term *absolute*, which should not be taken as a referent to a transcendental being or object or anything resembling a Platonic form. Being (*ū* 有) and nonbeing (*mu* 無) arise or are made manifest in the self-negation of nothingness (*mu* 無) and as place (*basho*). The term *absolute* in Japanese is *zettai* 絶対, which is composed of two words: *zetsu* 絶 (to cut-off) and *tai* 対 (opposition). The continual self-negating of absolute nothingness means that its *basho* is not relative to something outside or external to it. As both nothing (*mu*) and place (*basho*), *zettai mu* is not transcendent and therefore does not signify a non- or trans-temporal dimension. In this way, absolute nothingness can be said to be neither being nor nonbeing. This is the logic of absolute nothingness, a logic that is also a nonlogic since it is both prior and anterior to determinative proposition. The logic of place subverts its very determination even as it posits it. Thus, its absoluteness is that of an *Abgrund*, and as such comes close to the concept of chaos, which both resists form even as it gives rise to form. It is important to note that, for Nishida, *basho* is not a concept at its most concrete or existential level. The *basho* of absolute nothingness does not mean nonbeing but rather the place of the dialectic of being and nonbeing, as well as the dialectic of consciousness and history that enables the creative emergence of both individual and communal existence, thereby making possible the actuality of a new conception of a *nontotalizing* universal.

Opening oneself to the world and to community is contingent on how one views the self and its relationship not only to other human beings but also to the natural world in general, with all its sentient and nonsentient co-inhabitants. Even though the concept of the self or soul was construed by Plato as a dialectical relation between the individual and the community, the course of much Western thought has tended toward the development of a privatized, individualistic concept of the ego-self. There have been, of course, notable exceptions to this development, for example, Hegel’s formulation of I=We, Nietzsche’s exposure of the illusory nature of the ego, and Heidegger’s concept

36 Bret W. Davis, “Conversing in Emptiness: Rethinking Cross-Cultural Dialogue with the Kyoto School,” in Anthony O’Hear, ed., *Philosophical Traditions*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 74 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 180.

of *Mitandersein*, to name a few, all of which signal a decisive move away from ontotheologically grounded notions of subjectivity, will, and consciousness. To this list one can add the name of Watsuji Tetsurō.

## v Milieu and Betweenness in Watsuji

Sallis brings to our attention the concept of the *between* as what is primary. In the Prologue to *The Return of Nature*, he writes: “Since the things of nature are encompassed by various elements—and always by Earth and sky—they can be apprehended in the fullness of their appearance only if they show themselves within their elemental setting, only if an openness to the elements belongs intrinsically to their apprehension.”<sup>37</sup> We know what the elements *are* even though we have never seen them; what we see are manifestations of the elements or particular beings that participate, or are disclosed, in the appearance or showing forth (φαίνεσθαι) of the elemental. Lest the use of the term *manifestation* is misleading, it is important to emphasize that the elements are nothing like essences; if anything, the elements are *immanent universals*. Here we would do well to keep in mind the chorological Plato of *Timaeus* in thinking the relation between μέθεξις (participation) and the revealing-concealing movement of φύσις.

The disclosure of the elemental is this between and so constitutes the event in which time and place come together. Casey writes that

place becomes an *event*, a happening not only in space but in time and history as well. To the role of place as facilitative and locatory we need to add the role of place as eventmental: as a scene of personal and historical happening.... The two poles here at stake—place as locatory vs. place as an event with cultural/historical dimensions—are not exclusive of each other: one and the same place can support both poles just as it can exemplify wildly variant cultural vicissitudes.<sup>38</sup>

Specifically, I want to bring to our attention the aspect of “place as an event with cultural/historical dimensions.” This dimension of *temporality* figures prominently in Watsuji’s work, to which I now turn.

Reacting to what he considered to be Heidegger’s lack of emphasis on spatiality in *Sein und Zeit*, Watsuji published two years later *Fūdo*. Literally meaning

<sup>37</sup> Sallis, *The Return of Nature*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, xxv.

“wind and earth,”<sup>39</sup> *fūdo* is generally translated as “climate,” and certainly this resonates with much of what Watsuji takes up in the text. The French geographer Augustin Berque argues, however, that *fūdo* is perhaps better translated as “milieu.”<sup>40</sup>

Central to Watsuji’s thesis in *Fūdo* is the distinction he draws between climate and environment. The operative term here is *between*. It is a mistake to construe the word *fūdo* as only “natural environment”; *fūdo* also signifies that which is neither subject nor object but rather a relation of betweenness (*aidagara*): between self and other, human and nature, space and time, nature and objects.

Watsuji developed his concept of *ningen sonzai* 人間存在, or “human beings existing both individually and communally,”<sup>41</sup> in response to Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein. The term *ningen* (human being) is composed of two characters: *nin* 人 (person) and *gen* 間 (between or space). The term *sonzai* 存在 (existence) is also composed of two characters: *son* 存 (to preserve) and *zai* 在 (to stay in place). Although sharing affinity with the concept of *Mitsein*, *ningen sonzai* emphasizes in a more radical way, for Watsuji, the aspect of *aidagara* (betweenness), which denotes in part the fundamental actuality of the dependent origination of all things that forms the basis of Buddhist ontology, an interconnectedness that occurs in both subjective and objective space:

From this standpoint, we can say that subjective spatiality is, in the final analysis, the basic structure of *ningen sonzai*. Our endeavor to grasp *ningen* not only as a human being but also as possessing the dual structure of individuality and at the same time sociality leads us of necessity to this idea of spatial extendedness. How does subjective extendedness relate to space as objective extendedness? The ego’s discovering something

39 Watsuji, *Fūdo*, 1.

40 In her excellent essay on Watsuji, Erin McCarthy writes: “In order to more faithfully convey Watsuji’s notion of *fūdo*, Berque suggests ‘milieu’ as a more preferable translation than ‘climate’ (as was used in the English translation of the book). *Milieu* more accurately captures the mutual co-constituting at the heart of *fūdo* than the term ‘climate’ which too easily implies the understanding of *fūdo* that Watsuji rejects—the idea of climate as mere object, as something outside of, and apart from, human beings. For Watsuji, the notion of *fūdo* is supposed to suggest that the spatial, environmental and collective aspects of human existence are all intertwined in the complex concepts of *fūdosei* or mediance” (Erin McCarthy, “Watsuji Tetsurō: The Mutuality of Climate and Culture and an Ethics of Betweenness,” in Bret W. Davis, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020], 508).

41 For a thorough exposition of the development of this concept, see Watsuji Tetsurō, *Watsuji Tetsurō’s Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and Robert E. Carter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 19–27.

outside of itself initiates awareness of space. But this ego becomes the ego only when it gets out of *ningen sonzai*, and hence, it is by no means a primary existence. The existence of the *Thou* arises before that of the ego. It is only through *Thou* that *I* becomes recognized. In addition, this *Thou*, although standing in opposition to the *I* outside of itself, at the same time, is the *I*.<sup>42</sup>

Watsuji is laying the groundwork for this conception of individuality at the conclusion of his important work on ethics, *Rinrigaku* 倫理学 (literally, the principles that allow us to live in friendly community), in the chapter titled “The Spatiality of a Human Being”:

The stages through which the world of objects (as the natural world) arises out of this primordial element correspond to those stages through which environmental space, or space with its positions fixed, or homogeneous space, and so forth come to arise. Environmental space arises when one eliminates the tension spread over subjective spatiality and then stands on the standpoint of the individual.... The negation of subjective spatiality, that is, the standpoint of the individual, establishes these sorts of space. In spite of this, the origin of space lies in the “betweenness” of subjects, that contradicts the standpoint of the individual. Then, through the negation of this latter standpoint, perspective disappears and homogeneous space arises. This homogeneous space is the abstraction of subjective space carried to its extreme. At issue here is the natural world, which arises in an intersubjective way; and hence it arises in consciousness in general.<sup>43</sup>

In this remarkable passage, Watsuji manages in his own way to capture Nishida's logic of *basho*, while extending it in such a way that return us to the principle concept of the *between*, in addition to bringing in his earlier reflections on climate/milieu (*fūdo*), though now expressed as “environmental space.” His concluding sentence (“At issue here is the natural world, which arises in an intersubjective way; and hence it arises in consciousness in general.”) captures the dimension of what Guattari terms “mental ecology,”<sup>44</sup> which is a gathering concept that brings together the place of the elemental as the between of space and nature and its concretion as the thought of a bioregional dwelling.

42 Watsuji, *Rinrigaku*, 165.

43 *Ibid.*, 178.

44 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000), 49–60.

While influenced by Nishida's concept of *basho* in formulating the concept of betweenness, Watsuji himself confined the concept of *basho* in his philosophy to everyday experience.<sup>45</sup> That said, this does not preclude extending the place of betweenness to include Nishida's broader understanding of the *basho* of emptiness or absolute nothingness, which is prior to linguistic signification; in other words, a place of radical silence that groundlessly grounds the relation between the self and the other, and thus the self and the world, and which makes language possible.

## VI Dōgen's Confrontation with Naturalism

Perhaps no one in the Zen Buddhist tradition has more to offer on the relation between silence and language and on the relation between nature and Buddha-nature than Dōgen Zenji. But Dōgen is not without his critics. Among his main antagonists are those who propound what he considers to be the heresy of naturalism. Now, to be sure, there is a sense of the natural in Zen that is borrowed from the Daoist tradition, which was foundational for the early development of Chinese Zen (Ch. *Chan* 禪) Buddhism, but this is not what Dōgen is critical of. The heresy of naturalism is the idea that one does not have to do anything to attain awakening and genuine understanding, that one is already on the Way (Ch. *Dao* 道) and hence everything is fine just as it is, including oneself. This was wrongly coupled with the idea of original enlightenment and resulted in a *buji zen* (無事禪), a lazy do-nothing, frivolous attitude that goes against the idea of practicing one's place. Jason Wirth phrases this well: "The practice of the Wild [which is how Gary Snyder sometimes translates *Dao*<sup>46</sup>] begins with who we are, which is *how we practice where we are right now*."<sup>47</sup> But this practice is not an isolated activity; practicing to be fully in the now-moment is always the practice of movement, of being continually aware and mindful of the interrelationship of all of things, physical actions, and thoughts. It is to dwell in-between.

In the same way that a mountain cannot be a mountain simply by being a mountain, science cannot be science simply by being science. The emptiness of science is that science is not science all by itself. Science cannot produce the thought of what all science is. For example, science cannot tell someone what mindfulness is, but a mindful person can think without considering what

45 Watsuji, *Rinrigaku*, 311.

46 Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 10.

47 Jason M. Wirth, *Mountains, Rivers, and the Great Earth: Reading Gary Snyder and Dōgen in an Age of Ecological Crisis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 69.

science has to offer. As Heidegger notes, science cannot think, that is to say, it is not within the discourse of science to question its own place. This is not a value judgment about science; it is simply to say that thinking (*Denken*) is different from the investigations of science. Science cannot think how it thinks just by thinking scientifically. Why? Because this is neither its place nor its practice. But we are of course able to think about the relation between science and other places, such as poetry or ecology. This is the true place (*basho*) of the human being. Our place is to think and dwell in the *betweenness* of places or regions. To be in this in-between, however, we must also be between connection and detachment, between suchness and emptiness.

What is the place or role of detachment here? Heidegger, for instance, thinks of detachment as a manner of engagement, and therefore to the extent that science is founded on detachment, science can be thought in terms of a mode, one mode of being, which he thinks of as reductive, as having reduced a certain type of original engagement. While this is certainly an aspect of science, it is necessary at times in order to see the big picture of interconnectedness. For example, the vastness and complexity of space as grasped by astrophysics is meaningful to us not so much in terms of presenting measurements or theories that are beyond the scope of comprehension, but rather because it reminds us of how minute we are in the cosmic scale. Or, to give another example, the work of the biologist serves to remind us about how fragile the web of nature is, and how if we intrude mindlessly on the places or regions where other life dwells it affects the entire web. The famous image of Indra's Net comes to mind. This is a different mode of science, a mode which belongs to the place, or rather the *intersection* of the place of science and the place of philosophy.

This bears resemblance to Dōgen's project: One must not think that the way one sees a mountain is the same way that the myriad life-forms that dwell on the mountain see it. Dōgen is pushing us to step back from our egoistic perspective and our projects that give us meaning. In this sense, dharmically construed, detachment can be seen as a deep form of engagement. It is caring enough about the world to get out of the way at times and let things be as they are, not as how we always want them to be. This lies at the heart of the bioregional perspective, which is concerned preeminently with dwelling naturally in a place, a topic on which one can find no better guide than the Zen philosopher-poet and bioregional theorist Gary Snyder.<sup>48</sup>

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48 In addition to his *The Practice of the Wild*, see also Gary Snyder's *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1995); "Regenerate Culture!" in

What does it mean to dwell in nature? This question can be framed with respect to the sublimity of the elemental. Heidegger's turn (*Kehre*) from a transcendental horizontal projection of world to an indwelling releasement toward the open region, leads us to the question of whether it is possible to dwell, or at least think indwelling, in a nondualistic way.<sup>49</sup> From there we might move to a discussion about the relation between dwelling, language, and culture. Dwelling in nature is not simply a matter of locution; it is also linguistic. Language creates meaning and establishes the horizons of intelligibility in which we dwell.

The question of language is problematized for us by Dōgen in "*Sansuikyō*" (Mountains and Waters Sutra) which is why Zen turns ultimately toward practice (*gyō* 行), that is, toward a place between thinking and not-thinking, a *non*-thinking (*hi-shiryō* 非思量), which can also be translated variously as a beneath, beyond, or before thinking. I point this out in order to emphasize both the spatial and temporal aspects of this fundamental term for Dōgen. In the practice of *zazen* 坐禪 (sitting meditation), one experiences the nonlinguistic side of being outside language, which leads to a thinking of dwelling as a state of mind.

## VII Buddha-Nature and Nature

Buddhist philosophy generally holds that the concepts of nothingness and self are inseparably predicated on the way they are conceived. From this perspective, so too are the concepts of nature and the elemental, the ordinary and the sacred. Since none of these concepts exist essentially, that is, in themselves, they are said to be the products of *mind*. Dōgen avoids substantializing or essentializing the nature of mind by his radical extension of the Buddha-mind to include the exterior, phenomenal world: "the entire world of the ten directions—mountains, rivers, the earth, grass, trees, self, and others."<sup>50</sup> These others also include the innumerable host of animals, insects, fish, etc.<sup>51</sup> This

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Christopher Plant and Judith Plant, eds., *Turtle Talk: Voices for a Sustainable Future* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), 12–19.

49 On this see my "Walking in Wild Emptiness: A Zen Phenomenology," in Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz, eds., *Philosophy, Travel, and Place: Being in Transit* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 134–38.

50 Dōgen, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, Vol. 2, "Self-Realization Samadhi" (*Jishō zammai* 自證三昧), 696.

51 On the extension of Buddha-nature and Buddha-mind to nonhuman animals and other creatures, see my "Zen Eye Hunter, Zen Eye Hunted: Revealing the Animal Face of

is contingent on neither affirming nor denying the sacredness of nature, but rather on overcoming this and similar distinctions altogether, distinctions that ultimately resist realizing the fundamental unity-standpoint of all sentient and non-sentient beings, namely, dependent origination. My intention in pursuing this approach is to think the idea of a logic of *basho* that not only unifies the field of natural existence, releasing it from a sovereign conception of ground, but also turns the question of our relationship to nature back to our own understanding of who and what *we* are, and what our relationship to the Earth is.

Though not the first to do this, in a radical move Dōgen more than anyone else expands the concept of Buddha-nature in accordance with his expansion of the concept of mind, to include both sentient and nonsentient beings, as well as ever-changing phenomena and states of consciousness. “Buddha nature is always *whole being*, because *whole being* is the Buddha nature. *Whole being* does not mean a vast number of miscellaneous things, and it does not mean an undifferentiated, uniform oneness.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, Buddha-nature is self-creating and this self-creation is a perpetual re-creation, which is the meaning of dependent origination.

To ask whether nature itself is Buddha-nature is tantamount to asking whether every natural being is also Buddha-nature. However, before that question can be philosophically posed, one needs to ask, what is Buddha-nature? But to make that very inquiry is to risk ontologizing Buddha-nature, rendering it either as a conceptual object or something that exists. Buddha-nature is neither. And yet Śākyamuni Buddha himself speaks of Buddha-nature as that which must be affirmed. Dōgen begins the fascicle “Buddha Nature” by quoting the Buddha: “Living beings are all Buddha-nature. The Tathagata is continuously abiding and not subject to change.”<sup>53</sup> Dōgen’s concern is what the Buddha means by “all sentient beings totally possess Buddha-nature.” To “totally possess” does not mean possession in the usual sense of the term. First, there is no possession because there is no self who is the agent of possession. Second, Buddha-nature is not a thing that can be possessed, if only because it is not *something*. Dōgen claims that if we grasp the true meaning of the phrase “totally possess,” then we will see that these very words open us up to *moksha*, complete liberation and nonattachment. Buddha-nature is something we

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Buddha-Nature,” in David Jones, ed., *Buddha Nature and Animality* (San Francisco: Jain, 2006), 149–63.

52 Quoted in Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History, Volume 2: Japan*, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter (New York and London: Macmillan Publishing, 1990), 81.

53 Dōgen, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, Vol. 1, “Buddha Nature,” 234.



neither have nor possess, states Dōgen; rather, we *all are* Buddha-nature,<sup>54</sup> which is fundamental impermanence.

Buddha-nature “is” without being something, enduring but not substantial, in time but not synonymous with time, impermanent yet unchanging. Dōgen insists that Buddha-nature includes not only nonhuman sentient beings such as animals, but also nonsentient entities such as plants, in his understanding of Buddha-nature: “Thus, even if you take up the view of ordinary people, the roots, stems, branches, and leaves are the *all are* of buddha nature that rises and perishes simultaneously with all things. The Buddha said ‘If you want to understand buddha nature, you should intimately observe cause and effect over time. When the time is ripe, buddha nature manifests.’”<sup>55</sup> Dōgen makes it clear that it is not the “wild movements of the mind” that constitute realization or awakening, or lead the way toward it. It is a clear-minded observation of the way of things that reveals the actuality of what is.

“*Sansuikyō*” (Mountains and Waters Sutra) is not a discussion about the abstractions of emptiness and form; it is about mountains and waters, in other words, the elemental. Buddha-nature and the elemental are one and the same. Dōgen affirms that the “mountains, rivers, and the great earth are all the ocean of buddha nature” insofar as they “*all depend on it....* This being so, to see mountains and rivers is to see buddha nature.”<sup>56</sup> This dependency surpasses all understanding, yet it is all around us. When this seeing occurs, we also see into our own true nature as well as into the nature of the elemental of which we are a part.

“Going beyond Buddha”<sup>57</sup> means in part becoming nonattached to Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature cannot be identified as either this or that because it permeates everything in a fundamentally interconnected way, in other words, absolutely and not relatively. The problem then is not whether nature has Buddha-nature. Neither is the problem whether nature is sacred, or has intrinsic value, or whether nature is Buddha-nature, or whether there is a fundamentally correct epistemology, or whether science or metaphysics holds the truth. The nondual structure of mind knows that the answer is both yes and no, but also that this is insufficient. This is the standpoint from which Dōgen is able to state that there is no (*mū* 無) Buddha-nature. In the *Diamond Sutra*, the teaching is the “attainment of no attainment.” Buddha-nature is emptiness, and as emptiness it is form. “Emptiness is form, form is emptiness,” expounds

54 Ibid., 234–35, 251.

55 Ibid., 237.

56 Ibid., 238.

57 See *ibid.*, “Going beyond Buddha” (*Bukkōjōji* 佛向上事), 315–23.

the *Heart Sutra*. This is the *mahāprajñāparamitā*, the perfection of great wisdom, of the Buddha-dharma.

## VIII The Appearance of the Hidden

Only when the interdependency of all entities is grasped is the *emptiness*—which is not the same as nothingness—that liberates us all also seen as such. This is the realization of Buddha-nature that is neither this nor that. The expression of Buddha-nature is the activity of being Buddha. “Knowing” this relation between the expression and activity of Buddha-nature, “thinking like” this, is a matter of realizing the “time-being” (*uji*) of Buddha-nature. Quoting the Buddha, Dōgen writes: “If you want to understand buddha nature, you should intimately observe cause and effect over time. When the time is ripe, buddha nature manifests.”<sup>58</sup> Thus the distinction between original and acquired enlightenment falls away. Though distinct, they are simultaneously occurring. “Impermanence is itself Buddha-nature.”<sup>59</sup>

The “great matter” in Buddhism is the coming to grips with impermanence, with birth and death. Confronting our finitude, our death, marks a separate place both in our life and at the end of our life, a space in which the fullness of nature ceases to be for us as a living organic being but also a space in which nature asserts itself in its emptiness. This place of nonplace is what makes φύσις what it truly is. The emerging, revealing aspect of φύσις is readily apparent; what is less so is the concealing, retreating aspect. Nature loves to hide.

For all his alleged shadowy pessimism and obscurantism, there is a playful dimension to hiding that Heracleitus the Riddler (αἰνικτήης)<sup>60</sup> is inviting us to entertain. Hiding certainly occurs when there is a threat of danger, as nature’s myriad creatures teach us continually. But *loving* to hide implies a game, a teasing. Does nature play a form of hide-and-go-seek, or is it even simpler, a game of peek-a-boo? The paradox of nature loving to hide is that there is nowhere for nature to hide; nature is omnipresent. Does the act hiding occur within *our own* nature? Perhaps this game is merely a tactic of delay to ward off the inevitability of death and decay, both intrinsic to nature? The appearances, the visages, of nature *are* the elementals, which are immediate in their presence and

58 Ibid., “Buddha Nature,” 237.

59 Ibid., 243.

60 According to Diogenes Laertius, this title was bequeathed by Timon of Phlius, the third-century BCE satirist. See G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 184.

transcendent in their utter magnitude and power, both chthonic and foreign, yet exuding a sense of divine otherworldliness all the same. Nature and the elemental, nonidentical twins, need to be other than what they simply are in order to be what they are, otherwise they cannot be known for what they are, and we cannot then truly know ourselves bound as we are to them.

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